



ACCESS AND BIODIVERSITY

Can lead to a polarisation of views:

1. Alasdair Mitchell writing in the Shooting Times & Country Magazine regarding 'Public access and wildlife preservation'

The prospect of selling off public forests:

"..... public access has been portrayed as going with wildlife protection like a horse and carriage. As a sleight of hand, this is masterly. Or do those who drive their pooches to the local forest in a pollution-spewing car, then leave them off the leash to root around in the undergrowth munching small mammals, really think they are at one with nature?"

In fairness, Alasdair goes on to extol the features of Environmental Stewardship permissive access; *"polite notices, dogs on leads under control, the system seems to work, walkers are happy, wildlife largely undisturbed."*

However, permissive access is no longer funded by Natural England.

2. The Wildlife Trusts believe that people should have access to wildlife and the natural world for enjoyment, learning and contemplation.

So, where does this leave us?

BIODIVERSITY:

Land Use and Habitats in Hertfordshire: Needs updating.
(Phase 1 Habitat Survey Project 1994-1997 (HMWT, HBRC; October 1997).

Total area of county: 161,281ha (definitive county boundary 1996).

Total area of arable farmland and urban: 107,373 (67%)

Total area of all habitats: 53,908ha (33%)

Proportions (%) of major habitats in the county:
(shown as a percentage of the 33%)

- Grassland (34,478ha) 21.4%

improved (12,241ha);
 semi-improved (20,772ha);
unimproved (1,465ha; <1%) made up of:
947ha neutral, 145ha acidic, 178ha calcareous, 195ha marshy.

- *Woodland* (14,957ha) 9.3%
 semi-natural broadleaf (8,994ha); new planting (5,362ha); parkland (600ha)
- *Scrub* (1,487ha) 0.8%
- *Heathland* (21ha) 0.1%
- *Open water* >0.3ha (623ha) 0.3%
- *Wetlands* - all types (114ha) 0.1%
- *Artificial habitats* (2228ha) 1%

= 33%

LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

Why bother? Does it matter? *For some, it clearly does not!*

We think it does:

- diversity of life on earth
- beauty – an appreciation of the natural world;
- health – fresh air, feel-good factor, relaxation
- education – an appreciation of the natural world
- we need the natural world for our basic biological requirements:
 FOOD SHELTER REPRODUCTION

MANAGING ACCESS

Open access land

The CroW Act allows landowners, and their tenants, to exclude or restrict access at their discretion in certain circumstances.

Recommended routes; national and local Nature Reserves (Wildlife Trusts) (RSPB)

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Passive	Aggressive
Walking	4 x 4 and motorbikes
Fishing	paint-balling
Painting	shooting
Nature watching	

Clearly, compromises have to be made; a balance has to be struck. The activity 'need' has to be compatible with the location and site.

- WOODLAND & WOOD-PASTURE; rides and glades. Conflicts: ground-nesting birds; Nightjar, Woodlark. Deer control. Forestry Commission uses 'no-go zones' to protect breeding Goshawks.
- HEDGEROWS & MARGINS; margins created through ES are NOT for public access, they are there to create additional habitats for wildlife, particularly, declining farmland birds.
- GRASSLANDS; meadows, pastures, chalk downland. Open access at Church Hill, Therfield Heath – Pasque Flower. Conflicts: rare plants, livestock, ground-nesting birds.
- ARABLE; Conflicts: ground-nesting birds, Stone-curlew, Lapwing, Skylark, and Yellow Wagtail.
- RIVERS & STREAMS; footpaths along banks. Conflicts: Otter, Water Vole? Buffer zones 4-6 metres from bank-top.
- WETLANDS; existing reedbeds, marshes, wet grassland and fen do not encourage access. Created sites from minerals extraction; Little-ringed Plover (Schedule. 1 species). Restored sites can be a huge success: Lee Valley Park, Panshanger, and Tyttenhanger. Access can be designed and controlled by natural features.